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ABSTRACT

The paper reports on results of a questionnaire completed by 166 parents of trainable mentally retarded students and compares results to those of a study performed 5 years earlier. Items focused on parental expectations for their adult child in employment, leisure activities, and living circumstances, and asked parents to indicate from among 15 skill areas those three most important for their child. Parents generally expected their children to be living at home or in a sheltered group home and expected them to participate in specially designed activities for trainable retarded children. The leisure activity expectations of parents represent a shift from the 1979 survey, which indicated that more parents expected their children to participate in independent activities. Communication, self-help skills, and reading were ranked the highest among 15 skill areas in both 1979 and 1984 studies. Additional questions addressed parent-school communication, parent attitudes toward the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee, and parent participation in counseling regarding their child's education. (CL)

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REPORT ON A PARENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE TASK FORCE FOR THE TRAINABLE RETARDED

L. M. Earl & K. Clark

Research Report 84-06

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REPORT ON A PARENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE TASK FORCE FOR THE TRAINABLE RETARDED

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In 1979 the task force studying the educational needs of the trainable retarded submitted a report entitled "A Place to Grow". This report provided direction for programming for the five years from 1980-85. As the next five years approach, a second task force has been established to extend the five-year plan.

One facet of the 1979 study was a survey of the opinions and perceptions of parents of trainable-retarded children enrolled in classes within the London system. The current task force decided that it was important, once again, to receive information from parents and, wherever possible, to compare the current responses to the responses of the parents five years ago.

Method

A brief questionnaire containing a number of the questions from the 1979 survey, as well as some new questions, and a covering letter of explanation were sent home with all of the children in the satellite classes and in Princess Anne School.[1] Approximately 285 questionnaires were sent home and 166 were returned, a return rate of 57%. The questionnaires were returned to the schools and sent to Educational Research Services for analysis.

Results and Discussion

Most of the summaries of the parent's responses are presented in tables. When comparable information from the 1979 survey is available, it has been included as well.

The first section of the questionnaire provides descriptive information about the children enrolled in the classes.

Table 1 gives a summary of the number and percent of questionnaire returns by the age and educational setting of the students.

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[1]Copies of the questionnaire and covering letter are included as Appendices A and B.

Editorial Note: Appendixes A and B were not included in the document when received by ERIC.

TABLE 1 Number and Percent of Returns From Princess Anne and the Satellite Schools by Age for 1984 and 1979.

	Princess Anne				Satellites				Total			
	1984		1979		1984		1979		1984		1979	
Age	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
5 - 12	22	30	18	44	48	59	20	63	72	45	38	52
13 - 20	52	70	23	56	33	40	12	38	87	54	25	47

Returns were received from 90 (58%) of the 155 parents of students in satellite classes and 74 (57%) of the 130 parents of students at Princess Anne School. Nine questionnaires from parents of satellite students arrived too late to be included in the analysis.

The following tables (2, 3 and 4) summarize the parents' expectations for their children when they become adults.

TABLE 2 Percent of Parents of Children at Princess Anne or in Satellite Schools Indicating Various Living Circumstances as the Adult Expectation for Their Child

Expected Adult Living Circumstances	Princess Anne		Satellite		Total	
	1984	1979	1984	1979	1984	1979
Independently	9	21	38	9	24	14
Sheltered Group Home	45	21	14	28	29	22
Foster Home	2	--	--	--	1	--
Residential Facility	2	5	--	--	1	3
At Home With Family	43	58	47	68	45	61

TABLE 3 Percent of Parents of Children at Princess Anne or in Satellite Schools Indicating Various Employment Conditions As the Adult Expectation for Their Child.

Expected Adult Employment Status	Princess Anne		Satellite		Total	
	1984	1979	1984	1979	1984	1979
Independent	8	25	53	35	31	30
Sheltered Workshop	59	56	36	50	47	49
Developmental Centre	14	6	7	15	10	10
Not Employed	18	17	--	--	9	9
Other	2	3	4	3	3	3

TABLE 4 Percent of Parents of Children at Princess Anne or in Satellite Schools Indicating Various Leisure Activities as the Adult Expectation for Their Child

Expected Adult Leisure Activities	Princess Anne		Satellite		Total	
	1984	1979	1984	1979	1984	1979
Independent Activities	22	37	72	59	47	48
Specially Designed	71	49	26	41	48	45
None	7	9	3	--	4	4
Other	--	3	--	--	1	3

Table 2 suggests that most parents in both groups (Princess Anne and Satellite) expect their children to be living either at home or in a sheltered group home. There is a slight shift in expectations from 1979 to 1984 towards increased numbers of Princess Anne students living in group homes (1984 - 45%; 1979 - 21%) and increased number of satellite students living independently (1984 - 38%; 1979 - 9%).

Table 3 indicates that the parents of children at Princess Anne generally expect that their children will either not be employed or will be employed in a protected environment. Parents of children in satellite classes expect their children to function in either a sheltered workshop environment or independent employment.

Parents' expectations for the leisure activities of their children, as detailed in Table 4, are for specially-designed activities for trainable-retarded children. This is a shift from the situation in 1979, when more parents expected their children to participate in independent activities, and may reflect the greater availability of these special programs.

Section II of the questionnaire asked parents to consider fifteen skill areas that are part of a program for trainable-retarded students and indicate the three skills that they felt are most important for their child. Table 5 summarizes these data.

TABLE 5 Percent of Parents Indicating That a Skill Area Is One of the Three Most Important For Their Child

Skill Area	1984		1979	
	%	Rank	%	Rank
Communication	54	1	55	1
Self-Help Skills	37	2	38	3
Reading	37	3	43	2
Social Skills	29	4	29	4
Work Skills	24	5	28	5
Household Skills	21	6	25	6
Motor Skills	18	7	18	8
Writing	15	8	24	7
Mathematics	12	9	18	9
Family Life	9	10	n/a*	n/a*
Sensory Skills	8	11	8	12
Leisure Skills	7	12	9	11
Economic Skills	6	13	6	14
Transportation Skills	6	14	10	10
Use of Community Agencies	6	15	6	13

*Family Life not included in 1979 survey.

The pattern of importance of various skills has not changed dramatically from 1979-1984. The most important skills are either communication (reading, communication) or basic living skills (self-help, social, work, household).

Table 6 details the parents' opinions about the kind of school their child should attend. Most parents agree with the current placement for their child, although a significant minority (35%) of the parents of children at Princess Anne continue to believe their children should be in a special class in a regular school.

TABLE 6 Percent of Parents of Children in Princess Anne and Satellite Schools Indicating the Kind of Class Their Child Ought to Attend.

	Princess Anne		Satellite		Total	
	1984	1979	1984	1979	1984	1979
Special School	62	62	9	15	34	39
Special Class in Regular School	34	35	86	85	61	59
Regular Class	3	2	3	--	5	1
Special Residential Facility	1	--	3	--	1	--

The parents were asked a number of questions about their communication with the schools. Table 7 summarizes the responses to these questions. Phone calls and parent-teacher interviews are the most popular form of communication. Many Princess Anne parents also use a communication book. Communication takes place at least once a month and most parents indicate that they would like it to be more frequent.

Since all exceptional children are reviewed annually by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (I.P.R.C.) the parents were asked a series of questions about I.P.R.C. Table 8 details the responses to these questions. In most cases the parents were informed about I.P.R.C. reviews by the classroom teacher (61%) or the school administration (13%). Twenty percent of the parents said they were not informed. Some of the parents, particularly those from the satellite schools, have attended I.P.R.C. meetings and about 60% were informed about the results of I.P.R.C. Most parents found the I.P.R.C. review was helpful.

TABLE 7 Percent of Parents Indicating Each Response to Questions About Communication With the School.

	Princess Anne	Satellite	Total
How do you communicate with your child's school...			
...individual program plans	50	38	43
...parent-teacher interviews at school	69	75	72
...parent-teacher interviews at home	16	11	14
...parent meetings	12	8	10
...phone calls	87	84	85
...communication book	55	17	35
How frequently do you communicate with your child's teacher?...			
...once a week	39	9	23
...once a month	41	47	45
...once a term	14	41	28
...once a year	6	3	4
How frequently would you like to communicate with your child's teacher?...			
...once a week	44	16	29
...once a month	38	61	50
...once a term	18	23	21
...once a year	--	--	--
What kind of communication do you find most helpful?...			
...parent-teacher interviews at school	43	49	46
...phone calls	15	31	23
...individual program plans	8	6	7
...parent-teacher interviews at home	5	8	6
...communication book	25	6	5
.. parent meetings	2	0	1

TABLE 8 Percent of Parents Indicating Each Response to Questions About I.P.R.C.

	Princess Anne	Satellite	Total
Who informed you when your child's placement was to be reviewed by I.P.R.C.?			
...Principal/Vice-Principal	16	10	13
...Classroom Teacher	55	67	61
...Resource Teacher	--	7	4
...Other	3	3	3
...I was not informed	26	13	20
Have you ever attended an I.P.R.C. review?			
...Yes	29	41	35
Have you ever been informed of the results of the I.P.R.C. review?			
...Yes	63	57	59
How helpful has the I.P.R.C. review been to you?			
...Very helpful	62	54	51
...Interesting, but not helpful	28	22	25
...Not at all helpful	10	24	18

The final questions asked parents about any counselling they may be receiving about their child's education. Sixty-three percent indicated that they were receiving counselling and this counselling was usually being provided by the teacher and/or principal (56%) or social agencies (27%).

Very few parents offered suggestions in response to an open-ended question about additional skills that might be included in the program for their children. The only suggestions were (1) closer interaction with non-handicapped peers, (2) safety skills and awareness of dangerous situations, and (3) crafts or handwork.

Summary

A questionnaire concerning educational needs was sent to the parents of trainable-retarded students in the London school system. The results indicate that there may have been a slight shift since 1979 in the expectations that parents hold for their children's adult functioning. In general, the parents seem to be satisfied with the existing program.

References

Isaacs, L., Posno, T.R., Wright, J. and Harris, G. Report on a Parent's Questionnaire for the Task Force to the Developmentally Handicapped. London Board of Education, 1979.